

**التعلم عن بعد والتدريس عبر الإنترنت خلال جائحة COVID-19**

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**Remote Learning and Online Teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Al-Mustaqbal University College, English Language and Literature Department, 51001 Hillah, Babylon, Iraq [jaafar.ejam@uomus.edu.iq](mailto:jaafar.ejam@uomus.edu.iq)**Abstract**

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, normal life has ceased in a large number of countries all over the world. Education, one of the most essential aspects of life, has been affected by this pandemic. As a precaution against the deadly virus, students and faculty members were prohibited from entering schools, colleges, and universities because the majority of people were under lockdown. As a result, national governments have decided to implement an online education system as a continuation plan for the conventional education system. Numerous nations have not yet experimented with internet-based education delivery, so it is possible that they will encounter obstacles along the way. Despite this, online education is highly adaptable, which allows traditional schools to begin offering students access to online classes. Internet-based learning and teaching present both opportunities and challenges. Online learning and teaching can be viewed as an alternative method. This study sheds light on the topic of identifying online teaching and learning. Additionally, it investigates the advantages and disadvantages of receiving an online education.

**Keywords:** Online learning, online teaching, COVID-19, English, ELT

**المستخلص**

نتيجة لوباء كوفيد-١٩، توقفت الحياة الطبيعية في عدد كبير من البلدان في جميع انحاء العالم. وقد تأثر التعليم، وهو أحد أهم جوانب الحياة، بهذا الوباء. كإجراء احترازي ضد الفيروس القاتل، مُنع الطلاب وأعضاء هيئة التدريس من دخول المدارس والكليات والجامعات لأن غالبية الناس كانوا تحت الحظر. ونتيجة لذلك، قررت الحكومات الوطنية تنفيذ نظام تعليم على الإنترنت كخطة استمرار لنظام التعليم التقليدي. لم تجرب العديد من الدول بعد تقديم التعليم عبر الإنترنت، لذلك من الممكن أن تواجه عقبات. على الرغم من ذلك، فإن التعليم عبر الإنترنت قابل للتكيف بشكل كبير، مما يسمح للمدارس التقليدية بالبدء في توفير الوصول للطلاب إلى الفصول الدراسية عبر الإنترنت. ويمثل التعلم والتدريس على الإنترنت فرصا وتحديات على حد سواء. يمكن اعتبار التعلم والتدريس عبر الإنترنت طريقة بديلة. تلقي هذه الدراسة الضوء على موضوع التدريس والتعلم عبر الإنترنت. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يبحث في مزايا وعيوب تلقي التعليم عبر الإنترنت.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التعلم عبر الإنترنت، التدريس عبر الإنترنت، كوفيد-١٩، اللغة الإنجليزية، ELT

## 1. Introduction

Because of the global rapid spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, people have started to take preventive safety measures such as self-isolation and social distancing to reduce the impact of this deadly virus. Another precautionary measure to contain the spread of the virus, in addition to travel restrictions, sport events cancellation, and cities curfew, is the temporal closure of schools, universities, and colleges all over the world because such educational institutions hold a large number of students. Due to such pandemic, most schools, universities, and colleges are forced to introduce alternative online courses through online education platforms in order to carry out their education programmes and keep in touch with students. Although online education is not something new, but this made a turning point to the use of online education because such courses weren't widely adopted (Liguori and Winkler, 2020: 2-3).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a discernible impact on the educational system. During this outbreak and lockdown, the main concern of education is about the online teaching. Educators have started to use digital platforms and technology in teaching in order to communicate with students remotely and limit the disruption of education, since online teaching during such circumstances is believed to be the only solution to carry out giving lectures. Though many students and teachers have faced many obstacles concerning online classes; because it was their first time enrolling to such classes in some countries. Yet, computers and mobile phones have paved the way for online teaching and provided great elements that could improve students' performance.

As a response to such crisis, remote online learning has become an essential method for education, as educational institutions attempt to slow the spread of the pandemic and prevent its transmission among students. In order to save time and space, many school, universities, and colleges have begun to conduct online classes via video calling software and apps such as Google Meet and ZOOM.

## 2. Online Teaching

Online education means teaching via the internet. It has been widely adopted for many years in advanced countries, while in other countries it may be considered something new. Such countries have started to adopt online teaching, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, as a course continuity plan instead of the traditional way of teaching. Instructors have to adapt their teaching to this new online environment, because they are expected to face many problems that haven't been faced with the traditional classes.

Ko and Rossen (2017: 28) state that "teaching online means conducting a course partially or entirely through the internet—either on the Web or by means of mobile apps that allow one to manipulate the online course elements." It is a way of learning that does not always require the presence of an instructor and learners in the same place or time. Therefore, it is called remote or distance education. Online teaching offers more convenience and freedom to both instructors and learners than the conventional one. Traditional teaching and online teaching, somehow, share the same basics. In other words, approaches to solve problems and instructional strategies (i.e., setting the goals; describing objectives; setting up the required tasks; and creating assignments) are similar (ibid: 37).

Dawley (2007: 3) asserts that "a successful online teacher is one who promotes the achievement of learning objectives by facilitating engagement to empower students as life-long learners." Catalano (2018: 9) states that the engagement of students is significant to success in online courses ,whereas without being engaged, students may

feel isolated. He continues defining what is meant by engagement. It refers to the amount of critical thinking, argumentation, and interaction that students have with the content of the course, other students, and the instructor.

The approach to online teaching is learner-centered. Thus, Dawley (2007: 5) states that instructors have to support student engagement in online learning. This is achieved when instructors decide to leave the conventional teaching concepts by encouraging learners to have more control in the virtual classroom. Moreover, instructors' job is to assist learners and create the perfect educational environment.

Instructors do not have to be computer experts to teach online. Basic technical computer skills are adequate, such as setting up folders on a hard drive; save, copy, cut, and paste files; send and receive emails with attachments; know how to use web browsers; and download and upload documents and images to the virtual classroom platforms. However, mastering these skills do not make good instructors because teaching is what matters most (Ko and Rossen, 2017:43).

### 3. Online Learning

Singh and Thurman (2019) define online learning as:

learning experiences in synchronous and asynchronous environments using different devices (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) with internet access. In these environments, students can be anywhere (independent) to learn and interact with instructors and other students.

Huang et al. (2020: 10) add that in online learning, learners can interact in a direct way with the content of the course that they find in varieties of digital formats such as video, audio, and document files. Furthermore, the synchronous and asynchronous online environments will invoke the development of social skills as well as personal relationships among participants. Concerning synchronous and asynchronous online learning, Littlefield (2018) defines the former as a learning mode or environment contexts where courses are held at predetermined times and dates and where students interact with their instructors in a real time via virtual classrooms , whereas the latter as a learning environment where the content is not provided in live classes, but on different learning systems. The main secret to successful online education is to encourage active learning. The term "active learning" is used to describe a wide range of instructional strategies and approaches, such as synchronous and asynchronous learning. It signifies a change from teacher-centered, in-person classes to ones that focus more on the needs and interests of the students (Huang et al., 2020: 11).

At present, a great number of schools and universities is looking for different ways to conduct online courses and classes. Technology that can be accessed via the internet, such as e-mail, video conferencing, and social media, can offer students participating in online education methods that are both effective and convenient for achieving their educational goals (Dumford and Miller, 2018). The management of knowledge constitutes the core of a technological challenge that has arisen as a result of this change. This idea refers not only to the construction of an information system and the dissemination of information, but also to the process by which information is transformed into knowledge and how that knowledge is applied to achieve positive results. Another challenge that may follow is that some educational institutions' staff and students need information technology (IT) skills. Some students did not get into action with online classes before , therefore, educational institutions like colleges and universities ought to place an emphasis on the development of these skills and on bringing students up to an acceptable standard. The mobile phone is an essential component that has the potential to act as an excellent facilitator when combined with

such a technology. Mobile phones use has grown hugely in the past decade and it is now a global phenomenon. Almost, all students nowadays have mobile phones, and it is clear that phones are not just a tool to communicate but is also a fashion icon of many young students. Thus, smart phones that include web browsing and email services are now commonly available (Bach et al., 2007: 16-17).

Huang et al. (2020: 9) state that because of this emergency situation of the COVID-19, educational institutions have to adopt flexible teaching and learning approaches in their educational programs, and remote or online learning is one of these approaches. Online learning is “concerned with providing access to educational experiences that are at least more flexible in time and space”. That is to say, by using technologies that can offer students the options of pace, place, and time with different learning styles used in face-to-face learning.

#### 4. Flexible Learning Approach

Huang et al (2020: 2) redefine a flexible learning approach as: learner-centered educational strategy, which provides choices from the main dimensions of study, such as time and location of learning, resources for teaching and learning, instructional approaches, learning activities, support for teachers and learners. In this way, teaching and learning can be flexible rather than fixed. This can help promote easy, engaged and effective learning.

According to Huang et al. (2020:2), flexibility in learning and teaching is not something novel. The term "flexibility" is used to describe the many options available to students and the ability to tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students. Learners should be given the freedom to determine how they will learn. Options for learning include when to study, what to study, how to study, what to study, what to study, what to study, and how to study. As a matter of fact, many new forms of education have emerged alongside the rise of digital networks. Such modes of learning can open more opportunities for flexible learning, such as open learning mode.

Open learning is, the use of teaching methodologies that can help students construct their own learning pathways (self-regulated) and be actively contributing to knowledge building, Specifically, the used teaching materials should be openly licensed and the resources produced during the course should also be released as OER. (Huang et al., 2020: 11)

Open Educational Resources (OER) include teaching materials such as textbooks, multimedia files, online courses, and lesson plans. In open learning mode, the learner is more independent, while teachers work as facilitators of learning. Huang et al. (2020: 3) summarize the characteristics of flexible learning as follows:

1. It allows learners to choose their own learning choices (Goode et al., 2007)
2. It focuses on learner-centered approach rather than on teacher-centred one, thus the responsibilities are taken by learners (Lewis and Spencer, 1986).
3. As learners are responsible for their choices, they should be more skilled at “self-regulation” in terms of achieving the goal. This will help instructors to promote more active and effective learning (Collis, 1998).

With flexible approach of online learning , there are number of strategies that could be used for setting up learning activities, these activities can be presented in different ways so as to create a learning environment for learners (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2020: 3-4):

1. For content production, there are free platforms that enable instructors and learners to share their documents online such as Google Classroom.

2. Course content can be also produced by using multimedia presentations, such infographic presentations generate a better interaction. For example, learners could be asked to prepare a presentation with screen capture narration using Power Point to present an assignment.
3. Another activity is the video chatting conferencing using many free available applications to make a communication and interaction in a virtual classroom, such as ZOOM, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams.

### 5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning

In fact, online learning has features that can have an impact on institutions implementation and course progress. Restauri et al. (2001) say that the inappropriate functioning technology can obstruct learning. Students' frustration with online classes' technological shortcomings can be mitigated with careful planning and an adequate technological support, so these factors should not be ignored when designing online courses. In addition, some activities, like student assessments, may be challenging to adapt to online classes without losing some essentials for instructors like "content knowledge or interaction between classmates." James (2002) states that the learners' assessment and feedback is limited. In other words, in spite of the tools that deliver information to learners that digital platforms provide, but it is still difficult to assess learners' feedback. Dumford and Miller (2018) assert that in online education, the feedback loop is problematic and there is not enough time for it, because it depends only on graded quizzes and MCQ exams. Therefore, the feedback will be summative rather than formative. Hiranrithikorn (2019: 16) says that one of the disadvantages of online learning is that it does not suit courses with activities, practice, or courses that require labs. Another disadvantage is that there is no interaction between learners themselves, hence it is sometimes difficult to learners to establish friendship relations with their colleagues.

Yen et al. (2018: n.p.) add that instructor-learner interaction is believed to be absent in online learning. To solve such issue "research has found that appropriate incorporation of technology can allow instructors to facilitate quality teacher-student interactions, foster increased student engagement, and improve student learning outcomes."

The speed of technology plays, positively, a great role in online learning, and mobile phones are the ideal examples. Learners can access virtual classrooms through internet easily with the online services. Thus, enrolling in online virtual classes will be perfect and impact positively, especially for young students (Dumford and Miller, 2018). In addition, some general benefits of online learning, it helps learners to save money and time of going or travelling to schools or universities (e.g. no traffic jams). Another advantage that should be noted is that online education allows flexibility mode of learning (Hiranrithikorn, 2019: 16).

### 6. Conclusions

From the brief account given above concerning the remote learning and online teaching, the following conclusions can be arrived at:

1. Online education is not something new, but the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic made a turning point to the use of online education because such courses weren't widely adopted.
2. Online teaching during such circumstances is believed to be the only solution to carry out giving lectures, so educators started to use digital platforms and technology in teaching in order to communicate with students remotely and limit the disruption of education.

3. Countries that have not used online education before, have started to adopt online teaching, during the COVID-19 pandemic, as a course continuity plan instead of the traditional way of teaching.
4. Online education has flexible modes of teaching and learning, and it is basically learner-centered.
5. Instructors do not have to be computer experts to teach online. Basic technical computer skills are adequate.
6. Unsuccessful technological aspects of online classes can be frustrating for students and have a negative impact on their perception of the course.
7. One of the disadvantages of online learning is that it does not suit courses with activities, practice, or courses that require labs.
8. The speed of technology plays a great role in online learning, and mobile phones are the ideal examples. Learners can access virtual classrooms through internet easily with the online services.

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